

A D V I C E
T O T H E
P E O P L E
C A L L E D
M E T H O D I S T S.

Disce, docendus adhuc quæ censet amicus.

HOR.

Wesley 1st Irish Ed.



D U B L I N:

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A D V I C E

T O T H E

People call'd *Methodists*.

IT may be needful to specify whom I mean by this ambiguous Term ; since it would be lost Labour to speak to *Methodists*, so called, without first describing those to whom I speak.

By *Methodists* I mean, a People who profess to pursue (in whatsoever Measure they have attained) Holiness of Heart and Life, inward and outward Conformity in all things to the revealed Will of God : Who place Religion in uniform Resemblance of the great Object of it ; in a steady Imitation of him they worship, in all his imitable Perfections ; more particularly, in Justice, Mercy, and Truth, or universal Love filling the Heart, and governing the Life.

You, to whom I now speak, believe this Love of Humankind cannot spring but from the Love of
A 2 God.

God. You think there can be no Instance of one, whose tender Affection embraces every Child of Man, (tho' not endeared to him either by ties of Blood, or by any natural or civil Relation) unless that Affection flow from a grateful, filial Love, to the common Father of all : To God, considered not only as his Father, but as the Father of the Spirits of all Flesh ; yea, as the general Parent and Friend of all the Families, both of Heaven and Earth.

This filial Love you suppose to flow only from Faith which you describe as a supernatural Evidence (or Conviction) of Things not seen : so that to him who has this Principle,

*The Things unknown to feeble Sense,
Unseen by Reason's glimm'ring Ray,
With strong commanding Evidence,
Their Heav'nly Origin display.*

*Faith lends its realizing Light,
The Clouds disperse, the Shadows fly :
Th' Invisible appears in Sight,
And God is seen by Mortal's Eye.*

You suppose this Faith to imply an Evidence that God is merciful to me a Sinner ; that he is reconciled to me by the Death of his Son, and now accepts me, for his sake. You accordingly describe the Faith of a real Christian, as, “ A sure Trust and Confidence “ (over and above his Assent to the sacred Writings) “ which he hath in God, that his Sins are forgiven ; “ and that he is, thro' the Merits of Christ, reconciled to the Favour of God.”

You believe farther, that both this Faith and Love are wrought in us by the Spirit of God ; nay, that there cannot be in any Man, one good Temper or Desire, or so much as one good Thought, unless it be produced by the Almighty Power of God, by the Inspiration or Influence of the Holy Ghost.

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If you walk by this Rule, continually endeavouring to know, and love, and resemble, and obey the great God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, as the God of Love, of pardoning Mercy : If from this principle of loving, obedient Faith, you carefully abstain from all Evil, and labour, as you have Opportunity, to do Good to all Men, Friends or Enemies : If, lastly, you unite together, to encourage and help each other, in thus working out your Salvation, and for that End watch over one another in Love, you are they whom I mean by *Methodists*.

The first general Advice which one who loves your Souls, would earnestly recommend to every one of you, is, *Consider with deep and frequent Attention, the peculiar Circumstances wherein you stand.*

One of these is, That you are a *new* People, Your *Name* is new, (at least, as used in a religious Sense) not heard of, till a few years ago, either in our own, or any other Nation. Your *Principles* are new, in this respect, That there is no other Set of People among us (and, possibly, not in the Christian World) who hold them all, in the same Degree and Connection ; who so strenuously and continually insist on the absolute necessity of Universal Holiness both in Heart and Life ; of a peaceful, joyous Love of God ; of a supernatural Evidence of things not seen ; of an inward Witness that we are the Children of God ; and of the Inspiration of the Holy Ghost, in order to any good Thought, or Word, or Work. And perhaps there is no other Set of People, (at least not visibly united together) who lay *so much* and yet *no more* Stress than you do, on Rectitude of *Opinions*, on outward *Modes of Worship*, and the Use of those *Ordinances* which you acknowledge to be of God. *So much* Stress you lay even on right *Opinions*, as to profess, that you earnestly desire to have a right Judgment in all Things, and are glad to use every Means which you know or believe may be conducive thereto ; and yet *not so much* as

to condemn any Man upon Earth, merely for thinking otherwise than you do ; much less to imagine, that God condemns him for this, if he be upright and sincere of Heart. On those outward *Modes of Worship*, wherein you have been bred up, you lay *so much* Stress, as highly to approve them ; but not so much as to lessen your Love to those who conscientiously dissent from you herein. You likewise lay *so much* Stress on the Use of those *Ordinances*, which you believe to be of God, as to confess there is no Salvation for you, if you wilfully neglect them. And yet you do not judge them that are otherwise minded ; you determine nothing concerning those, who, not believing those Ordinances to be of God, do, out of Principle, abstain from them.

Your *Strictness* of Life taking the whole of it together, may likewise be accounted new. I mean, your making it a Rule, to abstain from fashionable *Diversions*, from *reading* Plays, Romances, or Books of Humour, from *singing* innocent Songs, or *talking* in a merry, gay, diverting manner ; your *Plainness* of Dress ; your *Manner of Dealing* in Trade ; your exactness in observing the *Lord's Day* ; your Scrupulosity as to things that have *not paid Custom* ; your total Abstinence from *Spirituos Liquors*, (unless in Cases of Necessity,) your Rule, “ not to mention the Fault of an absent Person, in particular, “ of *Ministers*, or of *those in Authority*,” may justly be termed new. Seeing altho’ some are scrupulous in some of these Things, and others are strict with regard to other Particulars ; yet we do not find any other Body of People, who insist on all these Rules together. With respect therefore both to your *Name*, *Principles*, and *Practice*, you may be considered as a new People.

Another peculiar Circumstance of your present Situation, is, That you are *newly united* together ; that you are just gathered, or (as it seems) gathering rather, out of all other Societies or Congregations ; nay, and that you have been hitherto, and do still subsist without *Power*, (for you are a low, insignificant

significant People) without *Riches*, (for you are poor almost to a Man, having no more than the plain Necessaries of Life) and without either any extraordinary Gifts of *Nature*, or the Advantages of *Education*: Most even of your Teachers being quite unlearned, and (in other Things) ignorant Men.

There is yet another Circumstance, which is quite peculiar to yourselves: Whereas every other *religious Set* of People, as soon as they were joined to each other, *separated themselves* from their former Societies or Congregations: You, on the contrary, do not; nay, you *absolutely disavow* all Desire of separating from them. You openly and continually declare you have not, nor ever had such a Design. And whereas the Congregations to which those Separatists belong'd, have generally spared no pains to prevent that Separation; those to which you belong, spare no Pains (not to prevent, but) to occasion this *Separation*, to drive you from them, to force you on that Division, to which you declare you have the strongest Aversion.

Consider these peculiar Circumstances wherein you stand, and you will see the Propriety of a *second Advice* I would recommend to you, *Do not imagine you can avoid giving Offence*: Your very *Name* renders this impossible. Perhaps not one in a hundred of those who use the Term *Methodist*, have any Idea of what it means. To ninety-nine of them it is still *Heathen Greek*. Only they think it means something very bad, either a Papist, an Heretick, an Underminer of the Church, or some unheard of Monster; and in all Probability, the farther it goes, it must gather up more and more Evil. It is vain therefore for any that is called a *Methodist*, ever to think of not giving Offence.

And as much Offence as you give by your *Name*, you will give still more by your *Principles*. You will give Offence to the *Bigots* for Opinions, Modes of Worship and Ordinances, by laying *no more* Stress upon them: To the *Bigots* against them, by laying *so much*:

much : To *Men of Form*, by insisting so frequently and strongly on the inward *Power* of Religion : To *Moral Men*, (so called) by declaring the absolute Necessity of *Faith*, in order to Acceptance with God : To Men of *Reason* you will give Offence, by talking of Inspiration and receiving the Holy Ghost : To Drunkards, Sabbath-breakers, common Swearers, and other *open Sinners*, by refraining from their Company, as well as by that Disapprobation of their Behaviour, which you will often be obliged to express. And indeed your Life must give them continual Offence ; your Sobriety is grievously offensive to a Drunkard ; your serious Conversation is equally intolerable to a gay Impertinent ; and, in general, that “ you are grown so precise and *singular*, so monstrously *strict*, beyond all Sense and Reason, that “ you *scruple* so many harmless Things, and fancy “ you are *obliged* to do so many others which you “ need not,” cannot but be an Offence to abundance of People, your Friends and Relations in particular. Either therefore you must consent to give up your *Principles*, or your fond Hope of pleasing Men.

What makes even your *Principles* more offensive is, this *uniting* of yourselves *together* : Because this Union renders you more *conspicuous*, placing you more in the Eye of Men ; more *suspicious*, I mean, liable to be suspected of carrying on some sinister Design, (especially by those who do not, or *will* not, know your inviolable Attachment to his present Majesty ;) more *dreadful*, to those of a fearful Temper, who imagine you have any such Design : and more *odious* to Men of Zeal, if their Zeal be any other than fervent Love to God and Man.

This Offence will sink the deeper, because you are gathered out of so many other Congregations : For the warm Men in each will not easily be convinced, that you do not *despise* either them or their Teachers ; nay, will probably imagine, that you utterly *condemn* them, as tho’ they could not be saved. And this Occasion of Offence is now at the Height, because
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you are just gathered, or gathering rather, so that they know not where it will end ; but the Fear of losing (so they account it) more of their Members, gives an Edge to their Zeal, and keeps all their Anger and Relentment in its Strength.

Add to this, that you *do not leave* them quite, you still rank yourselves among their Members, which, to those who know not that you do it for Conscience Sake, is also a provoking Circumstance. “ If you “ would but get out of their Sight ! ” But you are a continual Thorn in their Side, as long as you remain with them.

And (which cannot but anger them the more) you have neither *Power*, nor *Riches*, nor *Learning* ; yet, with all their Power, and Money, and Wisdom, they can gain no Ground against you.

You cannot but expect, that the Offence continually arising from such a Variety of Provocations, will gradually ripen into Hatred, Malice, and all other unkind Tempers. And as they who are thus affected will not fail to represent you to others in the same Light as you appear to them, sometimes as Madmen and Fools, sometimes as wicked Men, Fellows not fit to live upon the Earth ; the Consequence, humanly speaking, must be, that, together with your Reputation, you will lose, 1. The Love of your Friends, Relations and Acquaintance, even those who once loved you the most tenderly : Then your Business ; for many will employ you no longer, nor “ buy of such an one as you are ; ” and, in due Time, (unless he who governs the World interpose) your Health, Liberty, and Life.

What further Advice can be given to Persons in such a Situation ? I cannot but advise you, *thirdly*, Consider deeply with yourself, *Is the God whom I serve able to deliver me ?* I am not able to deliver myself out of these Difficulties ; much less am I able to bear them. I knew not how to give up my Reputation,
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my Friends, my Substance, my Liberty, my Life: Can God give me to rejoice in doing this? And may I depend upon him, that he *will*? Are the Hairs of my Head all number'd? And does he never fail them that trust in him? Weigh this thoroughly; and if you can trust God with your All, then go on, in the Power of his Might.

Go on, I would earnestly advise you, *fourthly*, Keep in the very Path wherein you now tread. *Be true to your Principles*. Never rest again in the dead *Formality* of Religion. Pursue with your Might inward and outward Holiness; a steady Imitation of him you worship; a still increasing Resemblance of his imitable Perfections, his Justice, Mercy, and Truth.

Let this be your manly, noble, generous Religion, equally remote from the Meanness of *Superstition*, (which places Religion in doing what God hath not enjoin'd, or abstaining from what he hath not forbidden) and from the Unkindness of *Bigotry*, (which confines our Affection to our own Party, Sect, or Opinion.) Above all, stand fast in obedient Faith, Faith in the God of pardoning Mercy, in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath loved you, and given himself for you. Ascribe to him all the Good you find in yourself; all your Peace, and Joy, and Love; all your Power to do and suffer his Will, thro' the Spirit of the living God. Yet in the mean time, carefully avoid *Enthusiasm*: Impute not the Dreams of Men to the all-wise God; and expect neither Light nor Power from him, but in the serious Use of all the Means he hath ordained.

Be true also to your Principles, touching Opinions, and the External of Religion. Use every *Ordinance* which you believe is of God: but beware of Narrowness of Spirit towards those who use them not. Conform yourself to those *Modes of Worship* which you approve; yet love, as Brethren, those who cannot conform. Lay so much Stress on *Opinions*, that all your own (if it be possible) may agree with Truth and Reason; but have a care of Anger, Dislike, or Contempt

tempt towards those whose Opinions differ from yours. You are daily accused of this: (And indeed, what is it, whereof you are not accused?) But beware of giving any Ground for such an Accusation. Condemn no Man for not thinking as you think. Let every one enjoy the full and free Liberty of thinking for himself. Let every Man use his own Judgment; since every Man must give an Account of himself to God. Abhor every Approach, in any Kind or Degree, to the Spirit of *Persecution*. If you cannot *reason* or *persuade* a Man into the Truth, never attempt to *force* him into it. If Love will not compel him to come in, leave him to God, the Judge of all.

Yet expect not, that others will deal thus with you. No: Some will endeavour to *fright* you out of your Principles; some to *shame* you into a more popular Religion, to laugh and rally you out of your Singularity: But from none of these will you be in so great Danger, as from those who assault you with quite different Weapons, with Softness, good Nature, and earnest Professions of (perhaps real) Good-will. Here, you are equally concern'd, to avoid the very Appearance of Anger, Contempt, or Unkindness, and to hold fast the whole Truth of God, both in Principle and in Practice.

This indeed will be interpreted as Unkindness. Your former Acquaintance will look upon this, that you will not *sin* or *trifle* with them, as a plain Proof of your Coldness towards them; and this Burthen you must be content to bear: But labour to avoid all real Unkindness, all disobliging Words, or Harshness of Speech, all Shyness or Strangeness of Behaviour; speak to them with all the Tenderness and Love, and behave with all the Sweetness and Courtesy you can; taking Care not to give any needless Offence, to Neighbour or Stranger, Friend or Enemy.

Perhaps on this very Account, I might advise you, *fifthly*, Not to talk much of what you suffer; "of the *Persecution* you endured at such a Time, and the *Wickedness* of your *Persecutors*." Nothing more tends

tends to exasperate them than this : And therefore, (altho' there is a Time when these Things must be mentioned, yet) it might be a general Rule, to do it as seldom as you can with a safe Conscience. For (besides its Tendency to inflame them) it has the Appearance of Evil, of Ostentation, of magnifying yourselves. It also tends to puff you up with Pride, and to make you think yourselves some great ones, as it certainly does to excite or increase in your Heart Ill-will, Anger, and all unkind Tempers. It is, at best, Loss of Time ; for instead of the Wickedness of Men, you might be talking of the Goodness of God : Nay, it is, in truth, an open, wilful Sin ; it is Tale-bearing, Back-biting, Evil-speaking, (a Sin you can never be sufficiently watchful against, seeing it steals upon you in a thousand Shapes.) Would it not be far more profitable for your Souls, instead of speaking against them, to pray for them ? To confirm your Love towards those unhappy Men, whom you believe to be fighting against God, by crying mightily to him in their behalf, that he may open their Eyes and change their Hearts.

I have now only to commend you to the Care of him who hath all Power in Heaven and in Earth : Beseeching him, that in every Circumstance of Life, you may stand " firm as the beaten Anvil to the " Stroke : " Desiring nothing on Earth, accounting all Things but Dung and Dross, that you may win Christ ; and always remembering, " It is the part of " a good Champion, to be slead alive and to conquer ! "

OCTOBER 10.

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